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FM AMEMBASSY ASTANA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4739
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE 1257
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UNCLAS ASTANA 000353

SENSITIVE
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STATE FOR SCA/CEN, SCA/PPD, IIP, DRL/IRF, ECA/A/L, NEA/PPD

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: CHIEF MUFTI'S OFFICE EXPRESSES INTEREST IN
ENGLISH LANGUAGE FELLOWS AT ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY

REF: ASTANA 0249

1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

2. (SBU) SUMMARY: As a follow-up to the Ambassador's recent discussion with Chief Mufti and Head of the Spiritual Association of Muslims in Kazakhstan (SAMK) Abasasttar Derbisali (see reftel), Regional English Language Officer (RELO) and Branch Public Affairs Officer (BPAO) met with Nurzhan Makhanov, Chief of External Relations and Protocol for SAMK, on February 19. After much discussion, Makhanov agreed that the best place to put English Language Fellows would be at the Islamic University of Almaty. Pending the Chief Mufti's approval, Makhanov suggested the Embassy meet with the rector of the Islamic University. The Embassy believes that this is a positive sign. END SUMMARY.

INITIAL RESISTANCE

3. (SBU) Makhanov began by summarizing the meeting between the Chief Mufti and the Ambassador. He said that after much consideration, he did not support putting English Language Fellows at the three major madrassas for two reasons. First, the students at the madrassas already study Russian, Kazakh, and Arabic, and would be overburdened by adding English. Second, Russian or Kazakh-speaking English teachers would be necessary. In response, RELO and BPAO said that perhaps English could be offered as an extra-curricular subject to motivated, talented language-learners and not as a mandatory part of the curriculum. They also strongly made the case that English needs to be taught only in English.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE FELLOWS AT ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY

4. (SBU) Makhanov then suggested that the Islamic University would be a better fit for English Language Fellows -- an idea that had already occurred to PAS. Emboffs mentioned how Al Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt, has hosted English Language Fellows for several years; is the most respected and oldest Islamic University in the world; and also helped establish the Islamic University in Almaty. This information seemed to please Makhanov, and the meeting quickly became much more positive and collegial. RELO and BPAO also noted that PAS Cairo had helped Al Azhar set up an English Language

Resource Center, and that establishing such a center in Kazakhstan would allow students at the Islamic University and SAMK staff to study English. This idea was greeted warmly by Makhanov, and he mentioned that he would like to participate in such training.

NEXT STEPS

15. (SBU) The meeting concluded by Makhanov stating that he would contact his colleagues at Al Azhar to find out more about their experiences with the English Language Fellows program. He said that if the Chief Mufti agrees, the Embassy should next meet with the rector of the Islamic University. We believe this is a positive development.

HOAGLAND